

## A final word

by Lavina Diamanti

Six years and 82 articles ago, I volunteered to write a monthly article for *NZ Dog World*. As a member of the New Zealand Dog Judges Association Board, I envisioned that it would be a vehicle of communication between the board, its members and the wider dog community. I have chosen not to stand for re-election for the judges board and therefore relinquish my role writing for the magazine under the NZDJA banner.

It has been an amazing journey. Little did I know when I started that it would, over time, have an influence on so many of our judges and exhibitors. Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to send me messages regarding an article or sought me out at a show to voice their appreciation. It really has made the journey so much more enjoyable. Thank you to those who have contributed when I have asked and those who, mostly unknowingly, gave me inspiration for a subject to write about. After 10 years on the board of NZDJA it is time for me to hand over to someone else. My final words are some of the messages to both judges and exhibitors that have been a part of some of the articles.

### For our exhibitors:

- Judging is subjective. Everyone's journey is different and that is why we have different results.
- Only an experienced specialist really knows your breed. The rest of us are all-rounders and constantly learning.
- It takes years of hard work and study to be an All Breeds judge. Be kind to our judges still on their learning journey.
- Stop blaming judges for the decline in entries in our sport. Start looking at the real reasons and do your bit to help fix it.
- The majority of our judges are honest and do a good job, even if it isn't the result you wanted.
- Pretty leads and flashy show suits don't make one iota of difference to a good judge, but they can improve the overall picture.
- The judge can only judge what they have in front of them, and they have less than two minutes for each dog. Train your dogs and present them well, in clean and healthy condition.

### For our judges:

- If you want to be a judge, do it for the right reasons. Do it because you love dogs and judging dogs. Do it because you want to be a good judge of dogs. Any other reason is just wrong.
- Being a judge isn't going to improve your chances in the show ring, but it will make you a better exhibitor and improve the quality of dogs you are prepared to show.

- Be the judge that clubs want to invite back, and exhibitors want to exhibit under, even if they didn't win.
- Breed type is the most important thing, followed closely by soundness and form and function. Lose breed type and we lose a breed.
- Breeders are the builders and judges are the inspectors in the process. Our job is to assess breed type and sign off on the breeder's adherence to type.
- Presentation and handling are only final considerations, they should never be the first consideration.
- Learn each breeds history and function. I mean really understand the breed and what it was bred to do: form follows function. The rest will fit together and complete the puzzle.
- Study hard for your exams and don't aim for average: aim for excellence.
- Never be afraid to withhold a challenge or award. The breed will thank you for it even if the exhibitor doesn't.
- Don't fault-judge: you will end up with a line-up of mediocre dogs.
- You can't please everyone so don't even try. Please only yourself. You are the one who must live with your decisions.
- The only person who thinks you did a really good job is the one you gave the top award to, everyone else will think you could have done better. Get used to it.
- Not everyone has the temperament to be a judge. That's ok. Its not easy and you will need broad shoulders and sometimes a metaphorical suit of armour.
- Your breed standards are your lifeline in the ring, use them. You can't phone a friend or call time out, but you can check your standards. Exhibitors will thank you for it.
- Find a mentor, one who will guide you on your judging journey and give you honest feedback.
- Learn your rules and regulations and especially the Judges Code of Conduct.
- Be an ethical judge. If you need to check the regulations to see if you can or can't then you most probably shouldn't.
- Use discretion when using social media. Once in print, it cannot be unsaid.
- Learn something every time you judge, never stop learning and do it with passion.

Happy judging and goodbye. 🐾